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LEARNING FROM KING DAVID'S FAILURE

By Jim Newheiser

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What are the spiritual causes of a mid life failure?

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Calvin says of David's fall, Now here is a story which should make our hair stand straight up on end whenever we think of it – that a servant of God as excellent as David should fall into such a serious and enormous sin...

When a man of God falls, we all wonder how it could have happened. Jesus tells us sin proceeds from the heart (Mark 7:21-23). After being caught in his sin, David's prayer reveals the state of his heart, "Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (Psalm. 51:10,12). I don't believe David suddenly fell into this condition on the day he fell into sin with Bathsheeba. Instead, the sin with Bathsheeba was an expression of the sorry state into which his inner spiritual life had already deteriorated. Inward spiritual deterioration leads to acts of sin (James 1:14-15). In II Samuel 12 the prophet Nathan gives explanation for David's fall.

A. Ingratitude. Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these' (II Samuel 12:7-8). Sin blinds us to the goodness of God. David had lost sight of the great blessings God had bestowed upon him. He was no longer mindful of and thankful for his elevation from being a shepherd boy to becoming the anointed of God. He seemed to have lost his sense of reverent amazement at his deliverance from Goliath, from Saul, and from the enemies of Israel. Perhaps he has forgotten the land was united by the power of God (not David). The joy he had experienced when the Ark of the Covenant entered Jerusalem (II Sam. 6:12-15) seems to have dissipated. Rather than being content with his own wives and property he coveted the wife of another man.

In the same way, the Christian leader can begin to take God's kindness for granted. Like David, he has been blessed immeasurably! He can lose sight of the wonder of Christ's amazing work of delivering him from slavery to the world, sin and death. He can take lightly the privilege of his calling to the ministry. He may no longer marvel at how God has used him to lead others to faith and to build up the church. Perhaps he has slipped into a mind set in which he takes much of the credit for the success of his ministry.

The businessman no longer "rejoices in the wife of his youth" (Pr. 5:18f), perhaps noticing she is no longer so young and attractive as other women around him. He tends to see his wealth and position as the fruit of his own labor. He is no longer filled with awe and wonder at God's goodness to him.

The homemaker forgets how God has blessed her by giving her a faithful husband, blessing their marriage with children, and providing so she could stay at home.

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B. Undervaluing the things of God. Why have you despised the Word of the LORD by doing evil in his sight?... Because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife... (II Sam. 12:9-10).

Just as Esau was guilty of despising his birthright (Gen. 25:9), David was guilty of counting God Himself of little value. At the same time, David had counted his flesh of great value. He had exchanged the sweetness of pure fellowship with God for a few moments of pleasure. Then he sought to cover his guilt by bringing Uriah back from the battle. Uriah, in contrast, placed high value on the things of God, The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing (II Samuel 11:11). David should have been pierced by Uriah's piety, instead he shows the folly and hardness of his sin, by murdering this loyal servant of God. Like his predecessor Saul (see I Samuel 15:22,30), David seemed to no longer care what God thinks, so long as he could maintain his personal comfort and his status before men.

C. Idolatry. Isaiah 55:2 scolds, Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy. David chose to spend himself on the bread of fleshly indulgence, rather than valuing the free wine and milk offered by the Lord (Isa. 55:1). He thought sinful pleasures could provide greater fulfilling than walking with God.

The onset of the mid-life crisis may reveal how a man's accomplishments have been motivated too much by a love for the world (or the human glory of achievement) and not enough by a love for God. In mid-life the old bread of the world starts losing its taste, so a man may be driven to overcome his boredom and dissatisfaction by pursuing worldliness in new ways. His response to these difficulties exposes how weak his trust in God really is, and how far away he is planted from the satisfying rivers of His grace (Jer. 17:5-8).

Perhaps when David's greatest victories (and the accompanying adulation of the people) were behind him, his motivation for battle dried up. In the same way, the man who has made an idol out of sexual pleasure will be severely tempted when the flower of his wife's beauty begins to fade and his own virility is waning. He will seek out lustful diversions, not because of raging hormones (II Tim. 2:22), but rather because he is desperately trying to recapture the passion of his youth. Others may try to use material possessions to fill the void, hoping that their toys (i.e. the red convertible) will satisfy them. Others try to recapture their youth with a new wardrobe, an intense fitness program, or even plastic surgery. Many eat or drink too much as they try to overcome their spiritual emptiness. Some may try to recapture a dream of their youth. One successful businessman tried

to turn back the clock by spending thousands of dollars buying musical instruments and building a recording studio.

The man in a mid-life crisis needs to realize his problem is not that the world is passing him by, but rather that he is not valuing God and finding fulfillment in Him. People still turn to idols seeking the satisfaction only God can provide.

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